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A Statement of Policy and Aims Of the Southern Regional Council

Toward the South of the Future

EIGHT years ago, the Southern Regional Council was born out of the conscience and high resolve of a democratic nation at war. Today, in another period of international tension, we are faced with a renewed challenge to provide leadership and direction in a troubled region. It is essential that we assess clearly and wisely the role that the Southern Regional Council is to perform in this critical time.

We do not believe in the exclusive validity of any single approach or any single organization. There is not only room, but a desperate need for a wide variety of programs concerned with broadening democracy through legal, economic, legislative, religious, and educational means. Moreover, such programs are needed on all levels — national, regional, state, and local. Every group, like every individual, should chart its course with due regard for the special contribution it is fitted to make.

THE ROLE APPROPRIATE to the Southern Regional Council is evident in its origin and make-up. The Council's main asset is and has always been the people of the South who understand and want the full practice of democracy, and who at the same time know intimately the old evils that burden the South, and their causes. From such people is the Council's membership drawn. They have wanted a regional organization, not out of any provincial desire to separate the South's problems from the nation's, but out of the conviction that such an organization has unique advantages. It can express the best and often neglected elements of Southern thought and conscience; it can serve as a convincing demonstration of Southerners working together as fellow citizens without regard to race; and it can tap local resources and initiative often inaccessible to agencies outside the region.

The Council seeks to be a practical organization, emphasizing working solutions rather than spectacular pronouncements. Indeed, that philosophy is basic to an organization which hopes to open closed minds and substitute reason for prejudice.

The Council, by its very nature, is not a "mass pressure" organization. The number of persons in the South who are able and willing to reject the taboos on interracial effort in their own communities is growing, but it has not yet reached mass proportions. Meanwhile, the Council's membership can function effectively as enlightened citizens acting through the civic life of their communities in behalf of our common principles. Their methods are the established ones of conference, fact-

This statement of policy and aims was adopted at the eighth Annual Meeting of the Southern Regional Council, held in Atlanta on December 12. New officers, elected on the same date, are announced on page 8. Further details of the Annual Meeting, including changes in the Board of Directors, will appear in the January NEW SOUTH.

finding, and persuasion.

The Council takes no part in political activity. However, it can and does consult with public agencies and officials and makes its influence felt for truly representative government.

THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS may be briefly summed up as follows:

To serve as a meeting ground for citizens of all races, occupations, and religious persuasions.

To present the facts about the region, and their implications, through newspapers, radio, magazines, pamphlets, and other public media.

To counteract appeals to prejudice and violence by demagogues, professional bigots, and hate organizations.

To provide a program adaptable to local need in both the relatively backward and the relatively advanced areas of the South.

To translate appropriate research findings from universities and other centers to the practical situations with which the action program will be concerned.

To give special emphasis to the development of leadership among promising young Southerners of all races.

To convene, by interest group, key persons in the various fields of Southern life, so that steps to genuine integration may be representatively agreed upon.

To stimulate local initiative to work for local solutions in full democracy, so that legislation and judicial rulings may be translated into justice for the individual in his everyday life.

The basic machinery necessary to enable the Council to work effectively at these tasks is: (1) trained, competent, professional persons of both races working in each Southern state as agents of improvement in public life; and (2) staff in a central office of the Council to direct and service the field people.

THE DECLARED PURPOSE of the Southern Regional Council is "to attain through research and action the ideals and practices of equal opportunity for all peoples in the region." This objective has lost none of its timeliness since it was first adopted. Although the past eight years have brought notable progress in the South, the job remaining is a vast one, and the pressures of national and international events demand an even speedier advance. Many of our institutions continue to make unfair and unwarranted distinctions between citizens solely on the basis of race. Outmoded traditions, unjustified fears, and ancient prejudices continue to exact a heavy toll on the unity, productiveness, and integrity of our society.

It is the ultimate hope and aim of the Council that it may help in bringing solution to regional problems that transcend the question of race — problems economic, social, ethical, which affect impartially people of all races. But, for the present, the unique liability under which the South labors arises out of an unreasoning racial disharmony. The first task of informed and conscientious Southerners is to strive to create here the atmosphere in which artificial distinctions and discriminations based upon race will no longer persist. Only when that goal has been attained will the energies of enlightened men be fully released for the great task of realizing all our potential resources, natural and human.

THE SOUTH OF THE FUTURE, toward which our efforts are directed, is a South freed of stultifying inheritances from the past. It is a South where the measure of a man will be his ability, not his race; where a common citizenship will work in democratic understanding for the common good; where all who labor will be rewarded in proportion to their skill and achievement; where all can feel confident of personal safety and equality before the law; where there will exist no double standard in housing, health, education, or other public services; where segregation will be recognized as a cruel and needless penalty on the human spirit, and will no longer be imposed; where, above all, every individual will enjoy a full share of dignity and self-respect, in recognition of his creation in the image of God.

Equal opportunity, truly defined, includes all this and more. We have no illusion that it can be realized in the South quickly or easily or perfectly. Nor do we imagine that the Southern Regional Council can play more than a modest but creditable part toward its achievement. Yet it is the ideal toward which we strive and, short of which, we have a duty to remain dissatisfied. For it is nothing less than the American ideal.

A Program for Race Relations

By Harry A. Ashmore

IT HAS long been held that if you scratch a newspaper editor, you find a politician — and this, I suppose, lies behind the invitation to address you today. Certainly editors and governors have a great deal in common, even those governors who occasionally are moved to denounce "them lying newspapers."

Any editor, as you all know, knows exactly what's wrong with his state's government, and what should be done about it. He says so with smug persistency every day on his editorial page. And any governor, as my colleagues and I are fully aware, knows exactly how a newspaper should be operated. Some of the most profound lectures on the shortcomings of the daily press I have ever heard have been delivered in press conferences in various executive suites.

It has been my good fortune to have been in residence in most of the states here represented. I have worked on newspapers in three — my native South Carolina, North Carolina, and Arkansas. By courtesy of the United States Army, I have lived for varying periods in Texas, Louisiana, West Virginia and Virginia. I have covered stories at one time or another in most of the Southern and border states.

Mr. Harry A. Ashmore, executive editor of the Arkansas Gazette, delivered this address at the Southern Governors Conference in Hot Springs on November 12. Although NEW SOUTH would differ on some points — most notably with respect to federal regulation of employment practices — we believe that the address merits wide attention and respect. The Southern Governors would be well advised to think deeply on Mr. Ashmore's constructive recommendations.

I present these credentials by way of testimony that I am a Southerner not alone by accident of birth, or by virtue of having had two Confederate grandfathers, but by choice. And I present them because experience has taught me that they are a necessary prelude to any rational discussion of the subject I am about to introduce — race relations in the South.

BOMBAST AND MAUNDERING

I know of no subject that has produced more pure bombast, more fuzzy moralizing, or more sentimental maundering than this. For generations most Americans — Northern and Southern — have approached the profoundly complex problem of race relations in an emotional lather, and have spoken of it in terms of verities. There are deep well-springs of prejudice on both sides of the question, of course, and in recent years there have been added sharp and practical political considerations. Yet, surely, if there is any major question in American politics that — and I intend no pun — cannot be reduced to black and white, it is this.

The problem is still, as it has always been, primarily a Southern problem for the elemental reason that the greatest concentration of Negro population is here in this region. There have been changes in the pattern, of course; census figures show that the process of out-migration has continued and even stepped up since World War II, and there is doubtless some wry satisfaction for most of us in the fact that some of those who have so piously condemned the South are about to have an opportunity to study the problem on their home grounds. But none of these changes is of sufficient magnitude to guarantee that the problem will automatically solve itself. We here in the South will have to live with it, and wrestle with it, for generations to come — and we should under-

stand by now that we will not have the privilege of doing so without outside interference.

We have good cause to resent many of the strange manifestations of national concern over the racial problems of the South. We are not unaware that back in the late twenties professional politicians of both parties made the discovery that the race issue was about as handy a device as a ward heeler could wish. The promise to guarantee equality in all things by federal fiat has a direct appeal to the Northern Negro minorities who can, under certain circumstances, wield the balance of power in pivotal states. Moreover, it has a sentimental appeal to most whites who live outside the region.

THE NEGRO AS ABSTRACTION

To many millions of Americans — and to me these have always been the most irritating of the lot — the Negro has always been a sort of abstraction, a social worker's case history representing Something that Something Should Be Done About. For these doubtless sincere people, living in communities where Negroes are too few to constitute a social problem, condemnation of the South has been a sure way of making a fine, humanitarian gesture without cost to themselves.

Yet when we have recognized all this, we must also recognize that there are sound reasons why the pressure against Southern institutions has steadily mounted. It has been more the product of history than anything else. Gunnar Myrdal has cited the Negro's presence in the United States as an American dilemma, and in a larger sense this is an exact definition. Certainly, the plight of the Negro in a society which has never really made room for him is a matter of proper concern for every American, whatever limitation there may be upon his understanding of what the condition really is and how it came into being.

The Negro represents a conspicuous failure of the national system we have recently defended in a very warm war, and which we are now defending on a global front against a totalitarian power which has made good use of that failure in its propaganda. In all honesty, we cannot refuse to recognize that the Negro, more often than not, has been the exception to this nation's ethical and moral code, and even to our religious precepts.

We must recognize, too, that the problem has not been confined to matters directly involved in the relationship between the races. Here in the South, it spilled far beyond those bounds to shape most of our social and political institutions and to affect — usually adversely — the economy of the region. Until very recent years the Negro has been a negative quantity in the South, but no less a potent one. It would be a vast oversimplification to say that the Civil War stemmed directly and solely from slavery, yet it is fair to say that slavery was the great emotional issue of the time and the one that in the end precluded settlement of other regional differences short of war.

So has it been in the years since 1865. The one-party system is the direct product of the effort to disfranchise the Negro in the years following Reconstruction. The high cost of segregation has held back the overall development of our educational institutions. The presence of a large mass of unskilled, low-paid workers has materially retarded the economic progress of the region despite our great natural advantages.

THE WHITE SOUTH'S CONCERN

My own concern over these matters does not stem from sentimental concern over the black man's burden. I suggest, rather, that these are matters that should be of vital concern to the white South. And I suggest finally that they do not in the aggregate constitute a problem that is any more likely to yield to impassioned denunciation of our outside critics, fancy political maneuvering, or partisan secession than it did to armed rebellion.

That seems to me to be the political reality of the situation in which the South finds itself in the critical year 1951. We went through a tragic and divisive internal political struggle in the region in 1948 — and if race was not in fact a prime factor it was, as in 1860, the emotional issue of the hour. The makings of another great political rebellion are here in this room and again it is the peculiar institution of the one-party South — with its roots in the basic problem of race relations — that is

its cause. I am not personally concerned with these matters and I have no intention of dwelling upon them. I bring them up simply to illustrate my major point — that it is vital for Southerners of all political persuasions to develop a positive course for dealing with the peculiar circumstances out of which our peculiar institutions have grown.

'SOCIAL SEGREGATION'

I am under no illusion that this will be easy. We must begin with the proposition that the institution of social segregation exists in the South because it is considered essential by the vast majority of the white population, which is, of course, a large majority of the total population. Segregation is not, of course, an invention of the South or its sole property; it exists wherever Anglo-Saxon peoples live in close proximity with a colored race and it varies in degree in direct proportion to the numerical relationship. It was adequately explained, with no attempt at justification, by a Connecticut man who had the difficult task of heading the Union occupation forces in my home town of Greenville, South Carolina. Major John William De Forest, U. S. A., after struggling for two years with Reconstruction, wrote in his journal:

> "Not for generations will the respectable whites of the South, any more than those of the North, accept the Negroes as their social equals. That pride of race which has marked all distinguished peoples . . . that sentiment which more than anything else has created nationality and patriotism, has retreated to the family, but it guards the last stronghold with jealous care. Whether the applicant for admission be the Chinaman of California or the African of Carolina, he will for long be repulsed."

That too, is part of the reality — the reality which we in the South instinctively understand, and which most of those in the North either fail to understand or would ignore.

The practical problem before the South, then, is to preserve social segregation while at the same time meeting the conditions of a Constitution and a national tradition which demand that full civil liberties and full equality of opportunity be extended to all citizens without discrimination. If I read the election returns correctly, a considerable majority of the people of the United States have come to believe that this cannot be done, and therefore now to support, or at least accept, a federal program of legislation which is clearly aimed at the immediate end of segregation. Southerners in Congress have so far been able to stave off enactment of FEPC, anti-poll tax, anti-lynching and the rest — but, after all, their pot-licker recipes won't hold out forever.

So far we have attempted to meet the constant assault on segregation largely by negative means. We have fought back, sometimes successfully, but our weapons have been those of an embattled political minority and they are poor things at best. Some of us have suffered under the fatal delusion that we are victims of an evil conspiracy, and that if we could only remove a few key men from power our troubles would be over. This is nonsense, and it can be very dangerous nonsense.

PROTECTORS AND ENEMIES

For every genuine radical or cynical political opportunist who exploits the race question for his own ends, there are ten thousand sober, sincere, essentially conservative Americans who have accepted the proposition set forth in the civil rights program proposed by President Truman and embodied in the platform of the Republican Party. And the more we strike back in blind reaction to their demands, the more convinced they become that we are all misbegotten racists who will respond to nothing less than federal coercion. It is the melancholy truth that some of those who — I suppose, sincerely — have cast themselves in the role of protectors of Southern institutions are in fact the region's most dangerous enemies.

What, then, is this positive and realistic program of which I speak? It seems to me to begin, of necessity, with a proper definition of civil rights. As I understand them, civil rights involve the right to vote, the right to serve on juries, freedom of worship, protection of person and the like. These rights have been blurred, unfortunately, by the constant effort to project them into economic fields, and particularly by the fallacious theory that the right to a job should be included among them.

And we in the South, have compounded the confusion and weakened our own position when, in arguing against what has come to be called a federal civil rights program, we have too often failed to make the necessary distinction between such impractical and dangerous experiments as FEPC and proper federal safeguards for the rights of Negro citizens.

The hard fact of the matter is that the Negro in the South has already come within sight of obtaining his proper civil rights. More than 700,000 Negroes were qualified to vote in the Southern states in 1948, and so far as I know most of them did so without real hindrance. There are, of course, still areas in the region where the Negro is denied the ballot by extra-legal means, but the federal courts have struck down the last effective barriers to his full and free participation in the government under which he lives. There are, I suppose, still a good many Southerners who resent this, but there are few who do not accept it — and a considerable majority, I believe, has come to recognize it as an inevitable and not entirely unwelcome development.

RIGHT TO VOTE

The right to vote is by far the most important of the civil rights, for the others stem from it. As the Negro attains an effective, if a minority voice, in public affairs in the South the protections and benefits of the law will be extended to him as a matter of course. He has been denied a proportionate share of public funds in such fields as education in the past not because the dominant whites deliberately sought to deprive him, but because there was never enough to go around and the Negro was unrepresented in the halls where such decisions are made.

So it has been in other important areas of governmental activity during all the years of the Negro's second-class citizenship. We know that he has not always stood in full equality before the law. And we know too that there has been deliberate economic exploitation behind the cloak of segregation — not as much as our critics have charged, certainly, but enough to seriously weaken the South's case when we argue that segregation does not necessarily mean discrimination.

We have made progress in race relations in recent years. The present-day argument over lynching, for instance, is academic; the South, largely on its own, has effectively rooted out that indefensible crime. So it is with the continuing debate over the poll tax, which has been repealed in most of the states and is no longer an effective barrier to the ballot in the others. But it is also true that many of these changes have been thrust upon us from without and, particularly in the political arena, we have consistently failed to provide the effective leadership that our own tradition demands.

CIVIL WAR AFTERMATH

I have no intention of indulging here in a lengthy review of our post-Civil War history. Suffice it to say that in the first days after Appomattox there was a general willingness among Southern leaders to admit the Negro to full citizenship. Robert E. Lee spoke to that point, and it was General Ben Hill of Georgia who remarked that he had rather have the support of a Negro whose vote could not be bought, than a white man whose ballot was for sale. Emerging abruptly from slavery, the Negro was not equipped for a rational exercise of his new franchise, and his situation was complicated — through no real fault of his own — by the excesses of Reconstruction and the bitterness it engendered. Thus there came about the long twilight period in which the Southern Negro was no longer a slave and not yet a citizen — the period that now, for better or for worse, is drawing to a close.

I am not one to argue that every Negro in the South is yet properly equipped to fully assume these new duties and responsibilities. That is one of the most serious problems now facing the responsible political leaders of the South — the problem of integrating this new mass of voters into the body politic without severe dislocation. On the face of it, the Negro's past has endowed him with a full set of prejudices of his own, which means that he is a likely target for the emotional appeals of the demagogue.

Yet the remarkable fact is that no block Negro vote has yet emerged in the South, and even in 1948 — when Negroes for the first time since Reconstruction were sub-

jected to a calculated pie-in-the-sky appeal by the Henry Wallace Progressives — the minority race refused to be stampeded. This is certain evidence, I think, that there still exists a great reservoir of good will which centers around the average Negro's faith that the white South will, of its own volition, extend to him in due course the rights and protections of full citizenship.

While that attitude endures — and only a fool would argue that it is not imperiled today — it behooves the Southern majority to get on with the difficult and complex task that is its heritage. Considered in true perspective, the changes in the pattern of race relations in a generation are as remarkable as they are hopeful.

SEGREGATION NOT ABSOLUTE

Recent events have demonstrated that the wall of segregation is not absolute. Here in Arkansas we were the first to admit Negroes to the graduate schools of our university. We did so, not as a flambouyant gesture of political reform, but in practical recognition of the fact that we now have Negro students who are equipped for graduate study, that the state as a whole needs their services, and that we could not economically provide such education on a segregated basis. This does not mean, of course, that Arkansas is ready to abandon segregation at lower levels of education, or is likely to be for many years to come. It does mean that we have discovered, as have the citizens of other Southern states, that alteration of the pattern in a single instance does not mean automatic destruction of the whole.

It seems to me, indeed, that only through a pragmatic, objective re-examination of the relationship between the races can we expect to maintain segregation at the most important level — as a guarantee against forced intermingling of the races. We must recognize, first of all, that in fundamentally public activities — and the test here would be their support by tax funds — the Negro must either be treated without official prejudice or in absolute, incontrovertible fact be provided with separate but equal facilities.

When we have done this, we can argue — and I think be heard sympathetically — that we have met the stated commitments of citizenship, and we may then insist that all matters involved in the private relationship between the two races are, and should be, beyond the reach of the law. That, it seems to me, is a true Jeffersonian concept — a conservative concept if you will — in that it clearly defines the things that are Caesar's, and insists that all other matters shall be determined by individual citizens acting in their own way and in their own time.

When you apply this principle to the federal civil rights program, as an example, you will see that it immediately runs counter to the only really oppressive measure in that assorted kit — FEPC. No Southerner, it seems to me, can argue in good conscience that the Negro has had or now has full equality of economic opportunity. Moreover, it seems to me in the immediate self-interest of the South as a whole to work toward opening up new avenues of employment which will utilize to the fullest the skills of our Negro citizens and in the process raise their standard of living.

PRIVATE RELATIONSHIPS

But, even while thus agreeing with the stated objective of FEPC, we may still argue in good conscience that the method it envisions is both impractical and wrong in principle. The relationship between employer and employee is and must continue to be a private one. We may, as individuals, consider an employer's choice of employees foolish or even morally wrong — but his right to make it in his own way and according to his own lights must be inviolate if our other individual freedoms are to endure.

But we must recognize that we in the South have also violated this principle, and done so often. For instance, some states and many cities still have laws forbidding un-segregated audiences even on private property. Here, it seems to me, we have projected the authority of the state into a field of private relationship as certainly as the FEPC advocates would project it into private employment. The right of any group to practice segregation must be matched by the right to abandon it by consent of its own members. If we insist that intermingling of the races shall not be forced by law, it follows that we must also

(*Continued on Page* 8)

Wright Is New SRC President; Dent, Mynders, Hancock Elected

Marion A. Wright of Linville Falls, N. C., succeeded Paul D. Williams of Richmond, Va., as president of the Southern Regional Council following the Annual Meeting of December 12.

Newly elected vice-presidents are Dr. A. W. Dent president of Dillard University, New Orleans; Alfred D. Mynders, editor of the Chattanooga Times; and Dr. Gordon B. Hancock, Baptist minister and professor at Virginia Union University, Richmond. Carter Wesley, newspaper publisher of Houston, was re-elected to another term as vice-president.

Mr. Wright, an attorney, lived until recently in Conway, S. C. He has played an active part in the civic affairs of South Carolina and has held office in various organizations concerned with health, education, and welfare. A former chairman of the South Carolina Division of the Council, he has served for a number of years on the Council's Board of Directors and Executive Committee. In accepting office, Mr. Wright declared that Mr. Williams, in his six years as president, "set an example in leadership and achievement for years to come." Mr. Williams will continue in the Council as a member of the Board.

The three newly elected vice-presidents have long been among the Council's most active and valuable Board members.

Race Relations Program

(*Continued from Page 7*)

concede that it shall not be forbidden by law. If a man's right to choose his own company is to endure it must not be truncated because a majority may not approve of his choice. This, it seems to me, is the very essence of that concept of individual freedom to which all Southerners pay homage.

I happen to be one who believes that segregation in the relationships that are essentially private in character can endure in the South without violation of any of the real civil rights of members of either race. Yet I recognize that all too often in the past segregation has meant the denial of essential human dignity to members of the Negro minority. This, it seems to me, should be a matter of direct concern to any Southerner who holds public office — for practical as well as moral reasons. By and large the relationship between the races has been good over the years, but if it is to continue so a great responsibility falls upon the dominant whites, who control the sources of power in the region. We cannot turn our backs upon injustice simply because a black man is its victim, nor can we find a safe retreat in the sort of legalistic buck-passing that recognizes the existence of an evil but insists it is somebody else's responsibility.

In this way — and only in this way — can we find a tenable position in the larger community that is the United States. Our argument that the racial problems peculiar to the South must be left to the South for solution rests of necessity upon a clear demonstration that we are aware of them and that we are making a positive approach to their settlement.

I am, perhaps, guilty of over-optimism, but it has always seemed to me that somewhere there must be an area of compromise where men of good will on all sides of this pivotal question can gather in good conscience and work toward a rational program that will preserve the best of our past and provide a solid base upon which we may build in the uncertain future.

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To attain through research and action programs the ideals and practices of equal opportunity for all peoples in the region.